

MARK STRANGE

MARK STRANGE IS AN UP-AND-COMING MARTIAL ARTS ACTOR AND AMBASSADOR FOR VYOMAX NUTRITION WHO HAS COMPETED AS A KICKBOXER AND FOUGHT IN COMPETITIONS ALL OVER THE WORLD. HE EARNED NUMEROUS TITLES INCLUDING EURO-BRITISH FULL CONTACT CHAMPION AND MAI NATIONAL CHINESE FORMS CHAMPION BEFORE STARTING A NEW CAREER IN THE MOVIES.

and *Sinners*). More recently he played a fighting role in *Best Laid Plans*, opposite Stephen Graham and Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje and is often called upon for his talents as a fight choreographer.

With new projects on the cards, he is currently training for his next big film with director and long-time collaborator, Chee Keong Cheung, rumoured to be his most physically demanding to date. As an actor, he frequently pushes himself above and beyond to ensure his action performances are dynamic and exciting. For anyone hoping to improve their training or break into the world of action cinema, Mark offers a lot of inspiration.

MIKE FURY: LOOKING BACK, WHAT



MIKE FURY INTERVIEWS THE MARTIAL ARTS ACTOR...

MARK STRANGE



[ABOVE] MARK STRANGE VS JACKIE CHAN IN *THE MEDALLION*

Mark's film career started in Hong Kong, appearing in *Twins Effect* (under action director Donnie Yen) and *The Medallion* (squaring off to Jackie Chan). He also featured in *Batman Begins* and took the lead in *Displaced*, a British action film featuring Sir Ian McKellen. Continuing this success, he starred in *12*, one of the most successful British fight films of all time which even received endorsement from UFC legend, Chuck Liddell, and great support from Brit UFC stars, Michael Bisping and Ross Pearson. Mark later co-starred in *Bodyguard: A New Beginning*, a gritty action-drama shot in the UK and Hong Kong which united several screen legends of Asian cinema, including Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa (*Mortal Kombat*, *Tekken*) and Richard Ng (Jackie Chan's *Winners*



FIRST ATTRACTED YOU TO STUDYING MARTIAL ARTS?

MARK STRANGE: My earliest interest in studying and pursuing Martial Arts came from watching movies! I started off on Jackie Chan's films and remember enjoying them from a very young age. Classics like *Drunken Master* and *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* were some of my favourites and it was seeing those films which gave me such inspiration and made me want to go out and learn more. I was genuinely impressed by all the physical action stars. Sylvester Stallone was also one of my heroes and the underdog story from *Rocky* is one of the greatest ever told.

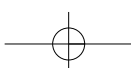
HOW DID YOU FIND IT SHIFTING FROM REAL COMPETITIONS TO

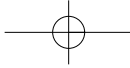
SUDDENLY ADAPTING TO CHOREOGRAPHY AND ACTUALLY PULLING YOUR PUNCHES?

It's definitely a change because you're going from sparring every day, competing every month and trying to knockout your opponent to selling hits in order to make a fight look cool. When you're fighting on camera, it's all about timing, distance and reactions to make it look realistic and ensure it's done safely. It takes two to tango so each person makes the other look good by selling each hit and making it believable. When I competed in Sanchou Kickboxing, I also did traditional forms competitions which are similar to learning a choreographed routine so it gave me a bit of a head start for movies.

SOME OF YOUR EARLIEST EXPERIENCES ON FILM SETS WERE ON THE MEDALLION, TWINS EFFECT AND BATMAN BEGINS. NOT A BAD START! HOW DID YOU FIND THIS AND WHAT WAS IT LIKE WORKING WITH HONG KONG STARS LIKE JACKIE CHAN AND DONNIE YEN?

It was a great experience, particularly because I'd grown up with those guys and suddenly I was doing fight scenes with them! I had a short fight scene with Jackie in *The Medallion* and





was action directed by Donnie in *Twins Effect*. They're both incredibly hard working guys and being a fan of their work, it was fascinating to see their methods up close. Despite the reputation of some Hong Kong stars going hard with the fights and connecting for real, especially in the old days, I found everything was extremely well

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planned and safe. It was just a really enjoyable experience and I was honoured to be involved. *Batman Begins* was incredible because working on a film of that scale really opens your eyes. I also met a lot of great Martial Arts and stunt guys who I later brought onboard for the film, *12*.

12 DID REALLY WELL AND SURPRISED A LOT OF PEOPLE AS A HOME-GROWN, BRITISH FIGHT FILM. IT ALSO TOOK AN MMA APPROACH BY SHOWCASING MANY DIFFERENT STYLES. WHAT WAS IT LIKE MAKING THE FILM?

It was a big challenge, especially as I was the lead actor. There was a lot to do but it was really good fun and great to utilise such a range of talent. We had a *Bloodsport* style concept with 12 of the best fighters competing in secret for a cash prize, which meant opportunities for lots of exciting fights and drama. Even though my background is in Kickboxing, I actually played a homeless bare knuckle fighter which was

interesting and the film featured many different styles, ranging from flamboyant kicks and tricking right through to brutal close quarters combat, grappling and even weapons. We had a great fight choreographer, David Forman (*Batman Begins*, *Clash of the Titans*), who gave it a real

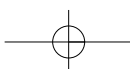
gritty style and made use of everyone's abilities as we had no wires or special effects. We also had an exceptional cast of home-grown talent.



[LEFT] MARK STRANGE WITH MICHAEL BISPING



[RIGHT] MARK STRANGE TRAINING WITH FELLOW VYOMAX AMBASSADOR JASON CORRICK



MARK STRANGE

DO YOU FIND IT DIFFICULT GOING TOE TO TOE WITH FIGHTERS OF SUCH VARYING STYLES?

Not really because when I competed, I was often fighting people of totally different



MARK TRAINING AT HATTON GYM

[LEFT] MARK WITH CEO OF VYOMAX SAMIR KIAMIA AT BODYPOWER

[BELOW] MARK IN FRONT OF THE VYOMAX STAND - BODYPOWER 2013



disciplines. I'd be up against every kind of kick, punch and sweep imaginable. I fought guys with a distinct Boxing style, Kickboxers, TKD experts and master kickers; it was totally random. But it's good because it meant I'd always be flexible and ready to adapt. This is what we wanted to bring to the table in 12 and show a lot of diversity.

12 RECEIVED A LOT OF SUPPORT FROM THE FIGHT COMMUNITY IN GENERAL, INCLUDING A GREAT RESPONSE BY SOME MAJOR UFC STARS. WERE YOU SURPRISED?

I was really pleased they enjoyed it and hopefully we did something a bit different with the fight film genre. UFC stars Michael Bisping and Ross Pearson attended the premiere at the ODEON Printworks in Manchester and really enjoyed it. The film also received endorsement from Chuck Liddell during one of his UK seminar tours so that was really positive.

YOU'VE ALSO DONE SOME SPARRING WITH MICHAEL BISPING! HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT?

It was during the lead up to UFC 120 when he was preparing for his fight with Yoshihiro Akiyama. He'd just started his fight camp and was training at Salford Thai Boxing with Darren Morris and his team. It was a lot of fun. Me and another sparring partner kept switching and sparring with him, focusing purely on the stand up. He's really a great athlete and an excellent fighter. I just tried to keep things fresh and threw a lot of kicks at him, including axe kicks and spinning kicks which are some of my favourites. I think we're only just starting to see these in the UFC because a lot of guys are worried about takedowns, which can happen if you're not quick enough. But Michael's well known for his striking so it was enjoyable and interesting to see how a fighter at that level trains.

WHAT'S YOUR TYPICAL TRAINING LIKE TODAY?

It's changed quite a lot over the years and I think you need to constantly evolve and shock your body, but also tailor to what you're doing. Since I longer compete it's now adapted for film because the emphasis is on physique and aesthetics, rather than real fighting. Now I



mainly split between Martial Arts, free weights and cardio. The Martial Arts is vital because it represents my main training and it's what I use on camera. I train with pads, the heavy bag and sometimes spar – plus it's crucial to stretch and stay flexible. Weight training is very important to develop the physique and muscle mass needed, both in strength and also looking the part, but I also think it should be functional, so you can use it to your advantage. You can do a lot of weighted body weight exercises and use it to improve your explosive power. I've also done caveman style training which some of the UFC fighters do. It's a lot of fun and serves a more functional purpose for fighters. Cardio is also essential for health and fitness and conditioning your body for long days filming action. Basically, in filmmaking you need to hit all the bases. I'm very pleased to be an Ambassador for Vyomax Nutrition who look after me and ensure I'm at my best for whatever I'm working towards. I'm especially grateful to Samir and Tracey Kiami at Vyomax for all their support and guidance. Depending on the film and the physique I'm training towards, they'll ensure I'm on the right track. Recently I was with them at the Body

Power Expo 2013 which I always enjoy. I did some signings and photos. It's a great show and always nice to see such a wide range of athletes and sports represented.

HOW IMPORTANT IS NUTRITION IN YOUR PARTICULAR PROGRAMME?

It's so important because when you're putting yourself on the line time and again, you need to be refuelling your body properly and hitting your training with 100% every time. You won't last long if there's nothing left in the tank! Making films, you also need to be at your peak because it can be incredibly demanding, shooting long days of physical action, so there's no substitute for a good nutrition plan. You need to combine a great, healthy diet with good supplement choices.

FINALLY, WHAT ADVICE DO YOU GIVE TO THOSE HOPING TO IMPROVE THEIR TRAINING OR EVEN TAKE A SHOT AT THE FILM BUSINESS?

Put your best foot forward every time; get plenty of rest, good nutrition and always keep your goals in mind when you hit the gym, whether it's building size, strength or stamina. Also, it can be really helpful having role models or people you aspire to. Pay attention to what they do and how they do it. I was always a huge film fan and grew up additively watching Sylvester Stallone. *Rocky* was always my number one favourite film! This inspired me from a young age and I knew I wanted to do what he was doing. I put a lot of time and energy into building an image of how I wanted to be. This involved spending lots of time in the gym training and being obsessed with Martial Arts. Also you need to learn about the filmmaking process and when the time is right, get together with likeminded people and shoot some material, a short film, or anything like that. If it's what you want to do, you have to be willing to put the hard work in.

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